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A STORY-TELLER ON CANVAS

BY CROMWELL CHILDE.

With original illustrations by W. Verplanck Birney.

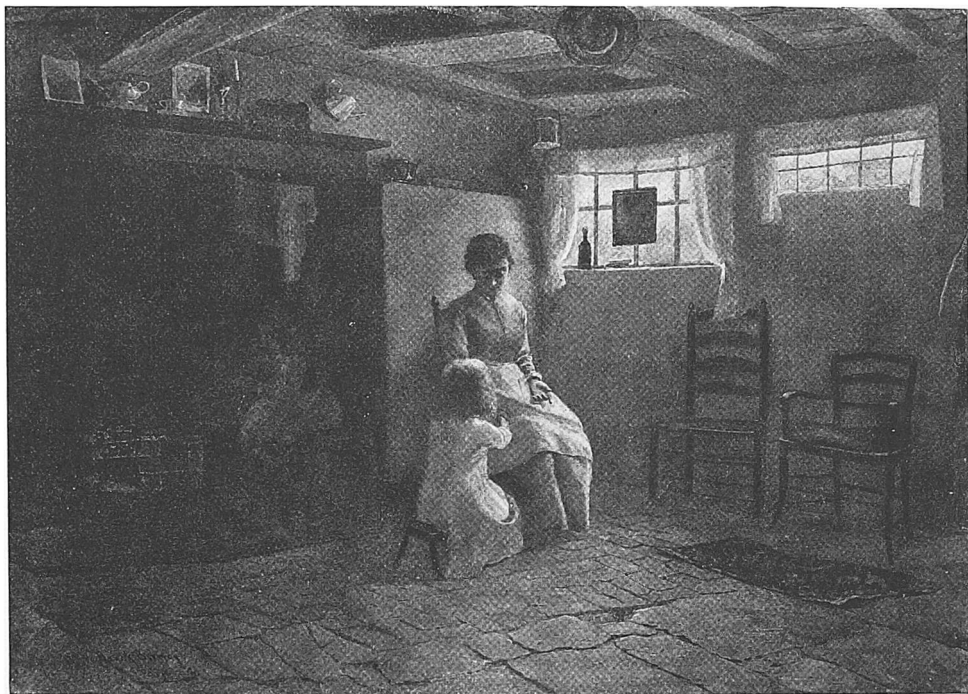


If there is one fault in the world of art to-day, it is the tendency toward "faddisms" of impasto and the worshipping of mere "prettinesses" of subject and style. The grand and simple methods of coloring and treatment in the old masters too often find their echo nowadays in catchy trivialities of the moment, clever bits of painting indeed, born of undoubted facility with the brush, but of little definite value. Art in its broadest and truest sense needs a plain *motif*, and each canvas as it leaves the easel is fulfilling its purpose if it shows not merely a surface of dainty tints and tones, but a thought.

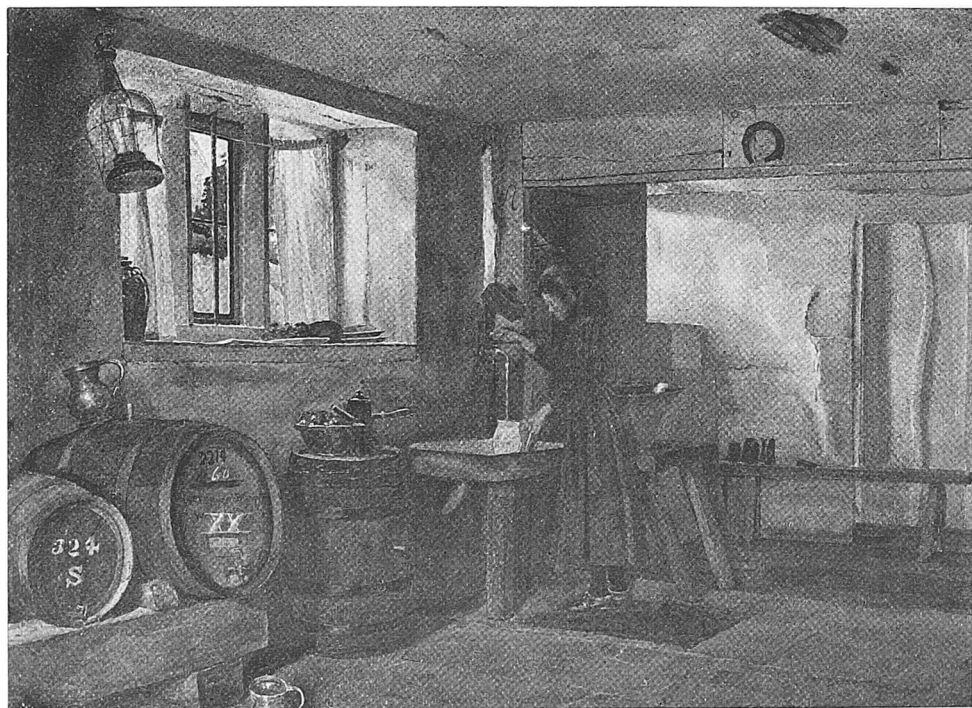
There is literature in art, as there is art in literature. The exquisite canvas of "The Last Token" at the Metropolitan Museum reveals, in its portrayal of the girl stooping for the rose among the savage beasts, a whole history of human passions—



WHILE THE TEA IS BREWING.



THE TWILIGHT PRAYER.



AN ENGLISH ALE CELLAR.



love, religion and the faith of the Christian martyr. In brief, it tells a story.

A story, told in its salient facts and not left to be guessed at by the viewer with his *pince-nez*, implies a thought, and an intellectuality that is literary and of the world of men and women, behind and directing the brush. The story-teller in art, far from sacrificing his devotion to color and form, needs both of these as aids to his success. They are the stage accessories to the drama he is about to "ring up."

The art exhibitions and "private views" of the past few years have given to W. Verplanck Birney, beyond the cavil of a doubt, a recognized



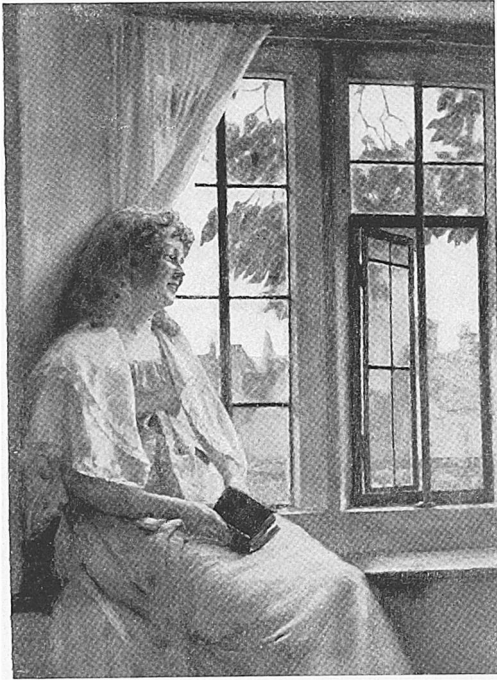
HIS PRIVATE RETREAT.

and a representative place among story-tellers on canvas. Should his tale be one of modern times, his maids are in the daintiest of furbelows and would charm without adventitious surroundings. Like the silk frocks of the ladies of early in this century, they can "stand alone." But Mr. Birney makes them, each and all, show a glimpse of their lives and of themselves.

Should he portray a bit of peasant life, the mainsprings of human action, whatever may be its trend at that moment, are unfolded. In one of his recent canvases, "Deserted," a village girl, her whole frame shaken with grief, kneels at a bench beside a tiny paned window. An elderly woman rests a pitying hand on the girl's

shoulder. Without is seen a vine-covered English church, and a wedding party is entering. In the figure of the groom one recognizes the girl's lover of the past.

The story is different in "Decorating the Old Flag," where a table is spread with gay flowers, and a band of bright-eyed children and girls are fastening them on the Stars and Stripes. "A Place Wherein to Think" shows a bewitching



PLEASANT THOUGHTS.

From grave to gay Mr. Birney's stories go. He runs the whole gamut, but most truly, most delicately, does he touch the notes of sentiment and sadness. His range is unrestricted over Europe and America. Germany, Italy, the Tyrol, France, England, especially the sweet rural life of Britain, all these are as familiar to him as is his own land. His birthplace was Cincinnati, and so he, too, has "come out of the West." But it has been the East that has inspired him, for his school-days were spent in Washing-



A HEAD.

girl in the brown-toned parlor of a quaint old English inn. Once more, in a Tyrolese sitting-room, a queer capped old woman sits and knits, while a dove, the symbol of the Holy Ghost, is above her head.



THE CHIMNEY CORNER.

ton, his student-days in Boston, Philadelphia and Munich. He spent four years in this latter city, varying the time by months in England, Italy and the Tyrol.

It was at the International Exhibition in Munich in 1883 that he scored his first success, being one of the two Americans who sold pictures there. His canvas was a German peasant scene—an interior called “A Quiet Corner.” In this, even so early in his career, he clearly showed the *motif* of his art life. A story was told in this picture—a simple one, a tale of girlish day-dreams, alone—yet it determined his course.

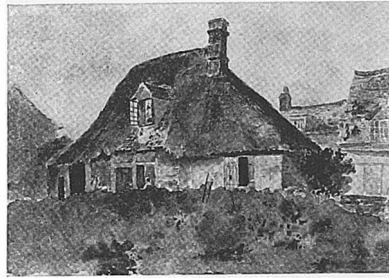
A few of the articles in his “creed of the brush” mark the trend of his thought. First of all, he is a believer in truth—the truth that exists even in the tiniest details. To accomplish this the majority of his studies are the spot, and each bit of “surput in with the most reverential

It is this that gives his picture value and their strength. In “Wherein to Think” he has contrived to canvas the inn of romance that little town of Worcester— an Abbey of a modern day has taken for his in his Shakespeare. In “Deserted” Shakespeare’s executed with all

Nor is com- his brush. “I he told me sions, jollity, canvas of this “A Fool and



CHARCOAL HEAD.



LONG ROOF LINES.

painted on rounding” is care.

tures their “A Place veined bodily in Broadway, shire, which hallowed and *mise-en-scène*

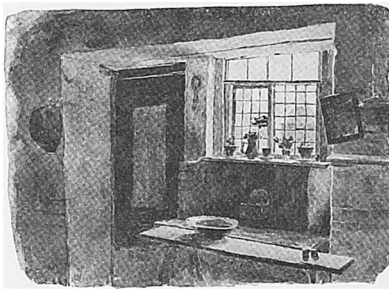
spearian black and white. the bed that is seen is own, copied faithfully, exact fidelity.

edly beyond the reach of like to paint comical ideas,” once, “laughing expression and wit.” Perhaps the best kind he has turned out is “His Lunch,” in which a merry jester smacks his lips

and winks his eyes over a frugal meal of onions and sausages.

As a colorist he is strong and virile, as a composer graceful and observant of detail, but his name will go down as a master of ideas.

Few Academy exhibitions of late have lacked a message from his easel. He is one of the young men on whom Academicians have their eye when they consider recruits for the jealously guarded rank of Associate.



DUTCH KITCHEN.



CASTLE KITCHEN.